

VZCZCXRO5568
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #0265/01 0291529
ZNY SSSSS ZZH ZDK
P 291529Z JAN 08
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5476
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000265

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/04/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: BATTLE FOR BAGHDAD PART 2: IT'S NOT OVER

REF: BAGHDAD 264 - BATTLE FOR BAGHDAD: MAKING PROGRESS

BAGHDAD 00000265 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

[11](#). (C) SUMMARY: Despite a substantially improved security environment in Baghdad, local residents continue to stress that the battle for Baghdad is not yet won. Most importantly, they assert that the Government of Iraq (GoI) and the Coalition have not achieved irreversible momentum toward the establishment of a stable and secure capital city in Iraq. Baghdad residents regularly express fear that the remarkable recent military progress may slow or even reverse because a government that many describe as weak, ineffective, and corrupt is still struggling to demonstrate the competence and impartiality required to earn broad popular support. In fact, many Baghdad residents do not believe the GoI is winning the battle for Baghdad; they believe that the Coalition is winning it. In surveys, interviews, spot reports and meetings with poloffs, PRToffs, and EPRToffs, Baghdad residents often credit Coalition Forces (CF) rather than Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) for security gains, and credit the USG rather than the GoI for economic development. This lack of public confidence, rooted in a reality of persistent GoI under performance, is impeding forward momentum. Cable three in this three-part series on the battle for Baghdad will examine crucial steps that the GoI can take in order to sustain and accelerate hard-won gains. END SUMMARY.

[12](#). (U) This political section cable draws on information, analysis and anecdotes from post's local contacts, the Baghdad PRT, the Baghdad EPRTs, as well as MNF-I spot reports, surveys and polling.

THE ENEMY IS STILL WAGING WAR IN BAGHDAD

[13](#). (C) Despite a sharp decline in attacks (reftel A - part one), the violence in Baghdad still far exceeds violence in the vast majority of world capitals, both in its political nature and its quantifiable extent. The enemies of Iraq -- including Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), insurgents, militias, government officials who support these groups, and criminals who profit from them -- continue to wage war against the GoI, the Iraqi people, and Coalition Forces. Sectarian and politically-motivated displacements, murders, and kidnapping still plague the citizens of Baghdad. Many of the militants conducting violent attacks are members of organized entities with an explicit political agenda to undermine or overthrow the GoI, and with sufficient popular support -- explicit or tacit -- to persist in killing, wounding, threatening, and displacing civilians and security forces in Baghdad. Most of these violent attacks still do not make the local or international news, as they remain commonplace in Baghdad; post learns about many unreported acts of violence through

EPRToffs and local contacts. Nor do many attacks receive attention from the Iraqi Security Forces, who lack either the will or the capacity to investigate the majority of violent incidents that occur in Baghdad.

ENDURING IMPACT OF VIOLENCE SLOWS PROGRESS TOWARD
UNITY

¶4. (S) Although the number of attacks and displacements has trended significantly downward since June, the enduring reality and perception of danger continue to touch every neighborhood and hundreds of thousands of families in Baghdad. The scale and extent of the past violence, despite its recent lull, continues to diminish the willingness of many citizens to risk trusting individual members of the groups they blame for the pain and loss they have experienced. Among the estimated total of over 7,000 civilians killed in Baghdad between February and November 2007, MNF-I analysts judge that more than 4,100 of those deaths resulted from ethno-sectarian conflict. Violent attacks wounded about 4,800 civilians in Baghdad during the same period.

¶5. (C) Buried among the statistics and stories about on-going violence is its psychological impact on Baghdad's population. A widespread paranoia about kidnapping still prevents many residents from venturing far from home, and continues to instill fear among those who move around Baghdad that the wrong dress, comportment, or name might increase their vulnerability to abduction. This phobia is rooted in reality: among all the major declining attack statistics in Baghdad, kidnapping has diminished at the slowest rate -- an 18 percent decrease between June and December, according to MNF-I statistics. Grappling with the daily terror of possible abduction, a resident of Zayuna neighborhood in 9

BAGHDAD 00000265 002.2 OF 003

Nissan district recently told poloff, "I want to drive to work -- a 20-minute trip -- without fear. Baghdad is not there yet." (NOTE: On January 24, the Iraqi Ministry of Health publicly announced their estimate that approximately one third of the Iraqi population suffers from psychological trauma as a result of violence. END NOTE.)

MOBILITY STILL LIMITED, FOSTERING SECTARIAN
LOCAL INSTITUTIONS

¶6. (C) When fear began impeding movement in Baghdad, paralysis paradoxically became a stimulus for entrepreneurs to create locally-rooted, single-sect institutions -- both public and private. Hospitals, clinics, pharmacies, banks, restaurants, and even mechanics in various Baghdad neighborhoods have reportedly begun to serve, by design or by accident, only one major sect or the other. These institutions parallel Baghdad's sect-based mosques, many of which have ceased functioning in neighborhoods where the sect that they represent happens to be in the minority. For instance, on the Shia-dominated eastern side of Baghdad -- in Karada, Rusafa, and 9 Nissan -- 28 of 60 Sunni mosques remain closed. These mosques do not serve their communities because the Sunni population has been displaced, or because the remaining Sunnis fear their mosques may be the target of Shia militias or AQI.

¶7. (S) As a result of these sectarian dynamics, Baghdad has witnessed the creation of many homogenous neighborhoods separated from one another by de facto "green lines." Residents who seek to venture far from home must first master their sectarian geography well enough to identify which neighborhoods remain dangerous to which groups. When asked if the battle is over in Baghdad, one local replied, "No -- I can't go everywhere in Baghdad -- so it's not over." Indeed,

when asked if Baghdad is safer now than it was six or even three months ago, Baghdad residents invariably say yes; but when asked if Baghdad is safe and secure, the same locals, without exception, say no. Many cite the continuing restrictions on their freedom of movement that persist despite security gains as one of the most significant indicators that Iraq's enemies continue to divide Baghdad. Mobility has significantly improved, but fear continues to confine many Baghdadis to discrete areas of the province.

CITY RESIDENTS WORRY THAT INCOMPETENT, SECTARIAN
GOI AND ISF COULD SLOW SURGE MOMENTUM

18. (C) When asked what sort of trends or events might slow or reverse recent security gains, Baghdad interlocutors most frequently cite the withdrawal of Coalition Forces. Local interlocutors do not/not appear to feel anxiety about the coming Coalition drawdown due to any affection for foreign soldiers; rather, Iraqi citizens of all sects and faiths, across Baghdad province, express contempt for the failings they perceive in their own government and security forces. Local Iraqi concerns about their government's performance provide a sobering perspective on the capacity of Iraqi political leaders to earn and sustain the confidence of constituents as they assume a larger role in 2008. A denizen of Sadr City summarized for poloff a common local view of the security situation: "It is very fragile. It seems the Americans are responsible for a lot of the progress. But they didn't defeat Al Qaeda. They didn't defeat JAM." If Coalition Forces withdraw, he said, "the extremists will return."

19. (C) In province-wide spot reports, interviews and meetings with post and PRTs, locals consistently describe several reasons for the success of the Baghdad Security Plan: The presence of more American troops; the decision by local Sunni leaders to turn against AQI and form Concerned Local Citizen (CLC) groups; CF detention of high-level JAM leaders; Muqtadr Al Sadr's 'freeze' order instructing JAM to halt attacks for six months; joint CF-ISF patrols; and increased understanding of local culture among CF soldiers. Locals do not cite ISF effectiveness as a major factor in the improvement of security in Baghdad. In fact, most of post's local interlocutors say that they believe CF perform in a more professional and non-sectarian manner than do their own compatriots in the ISF. (NOTE: Even as residents continue to register these complaints about ISF, MNF-I polls conducted in Baghdad with over 5,000 respondents (CSI, Corps, and CorpsI polls) signal a strong upward trend since September 2007 in overall public trust of the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi Police. END NOTE.)

110. (C) Local residents in Baghdad, where the Coalition and the GoI have concentrated the highest troop levels, sometimes

BAGHDAD 00000265 003 OF 003

credit Coalition Forces with the successes of high-performing units in the Iraqi Security Forces. They often report, for example, that guards at Baghdad's ubiquitous checkpoints have performed more professionally thanks to continuous CF monitoring. Some Sunnis who responded favorably to a December survey about the Coalition role in joint security patrols praised Coalition Forces for "keep(ing) terrorists and the Iraqi Security Forces away from them (the Sunnis)." Some EPRT team leaders have also perceived the crucial stabilizing role that CF play in Baghdad's strife-torn communities. The EPRT covering Rashid district described the strategically significant neighborhood of Saydiyah as a stark example of senior, sectarian officials in the GoI manipulating one branch of the ISF -- the National Police -- for partisan gains. Only the presence of Coalition Forces has thus far stabilized a delicate balance in Saydiyah.

111. (C) Locals express particular contempt for national

leaders and members of the Council of Representatives (CoR), but they also reserve a measure of bile for provincial and local leaders. Many locals describe the national government as distant, sectarian, corrupt, self-serving and ineffective; the provincial/citywide government as party-dominated, sectarian, and incapable of delivering essential services; and local government as militia-controlled or invisible. Again, the Coalition sometimes benefits from popular disaffection with Iraqi leaders: A resident of Rusafa recently noted, "People credit Americans for the improvements in their communities -- they think our political leaders won't think of the people. They (CoR members) went on the Hajj instead of taking care of critical issues."

¶12. (C) NOTE: Some local interlocutors describe rampant criticism of public officials as a product of Iraqis' extremely high expectations of their government, which many believe has the duty and potential to solve all public problems. Locals have described their delight, since 2003, at the unprecedented opportunity to rail against the government's failures to fulfill all of their needs. Whereas it remains risky to criticize local militant leaders, locals enjoy complaining about the GoI with impunity. END NOTE.
BUTENIS